

A Call for Worldview Transformation

by Hans M. Weerstra, former editor of the IJFM

I'm not a prophet nor a son of a prophet, nor am I a writer or a son of a writer. But not giving a prophetic word would be to miss a critical opportunity in the life of the *Journal*. From my vantage point, the most important IJFM “theme issues” that we published during my years as editor revolved around three core issues: 1) theological maturity in a cross-cultural setting, 2) missiological maturity in the presentation of the Gospel, and 3) spiritual maturity in the fight against the powers and principalities of wickedness. By maturity I mean, having a seasoned insight into the nature of God, man and evil that reflects the Wisdom and Truth of God. Those core issues remained at the heart of what I chose to focus on and publish throughout my seven or eight years tenure as editor of the *Journal*.

Theological Maturity

I have taken the liberty of highlighting just a few of the best special editions to give you a “heads up” on those issues that clearly spoke to my concerns. They are the following:

- Vol. 17:1, *Islamic Contextualization I*
- Vols. 17:2 and 3, *Nomadic Peoples I and II*;
- Vol. 16:4, *De-Westernizing the Gospel*;
- Vol. 16:3, *Mission Paradigm Shifts*;
- Vol. 15:4, *Spiritual Warfare II*;
- Vols. 14:1 and 2, *Worldview I and II*;
- Vol. 13:1, *The Biblical Mandate*.

This list essentially represents the full spectrum of my interests, which always revolved around a need to deepen our basic foundational understanding of truth and how to present it to the unreached peoples of the world.

In the issue on Islamic Contextualization (17:1) I felt the urgent need of the hour was to understand Jesus' identity in broader terms than His Sonship. If this critical facet can be resolved (within biblical parameters, of course) it can function like a key that will open the entire Muslim population to the saving

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grace of Christ. When such vast numbers of people stumble at a term we use, and exclude themselves from the Kingdom, might there be an aspect of the title “Son of God” that is more suited to their understanding and need? We, after all, hold the keys to the kingdom. Let us choose the right one, for heaven’s sake!

In that issue (Vol. 17:1), Rick Brown talks about the confusion, and even repulsion, Muslims have about the Messianic titles of Jesus. He says: “The way we use and interpret the titles of Jesus among Muslims is not only confusing but often repulsive, leading many to reject the Word of God before they have a chance to consider its message...” His article addresses the issues involved, and “if heeded will promote proper communication of the Gospel to Muslim peoples so that they may be able to hear, call upon the Lord and be saved.”

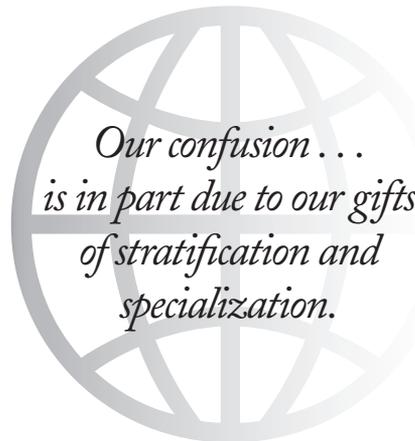
Part of my apostolic burden was to promote exegetical excellence and deep theological reflection. Brown’s article “uncovers the critical biblical texts to help us not only explain Jesus’ [Messianic] titles to Muslims effectively, but also to [help us] understand it more fully ourselves. His poignant analysis with linguistic implications for contextualized translation will enrich both the missionary in training and the veteran mission practitioner” (Editorial of Vol. 17:1).

Most of 17:1 is dedicated to a new strategy (a new approach) to contextualize the Gospel for and to Muslims in order to evangelize and plant Jesus’ Church among them. Yet, in my opinion, which now has become a strong conviction, Rick Brown’s article is by far the most important article in this otherwise very popular (most popular?) edition. Why? Because the two-fold missionary task is completed, when 1) the listener fully understands the implications of the message, and 2) when the proclaimer comes to a deeper state of awe and reverence for the Christ he serves. A missionary should always be coming to a new

place of reverence for the God he proclaims. Contextualization serves this two-fold purpose.

The theological burden that drove me to publish is also seen (at least indirectly) in *Nomadic Peoples I and II*, Volumes 17:2 and 3 that are very important, revealing, and extremely relevant editions to this focus. Dr. David Phillips hones in on this challenge and need. Presented here in three parts, Phillips makes the point clear, connecting theology with missiology,

God’s transcendence and his trinitarian character form a basis for



partnership with nomadic peoples... It is impossible to “wrap” God exclusively in the terminology of Western Christianity or any other form of Christianity. We cannot claim to know Him completely, in the sense that He is familiar and ‘possessed’ by us. What I am really saying is that this calls for nothing less than a conversion on our part if we are to do the job successfully in the years ahead. We must ask the question, “Who is Jesus to them?”

An example of this conversion is seen in the proclamation of the Gospel to the American Indians who need to know Jesus as “Healer,” which in the Greek NT is the same word as “Savior.” They should encounter Jesus as Healer—as Healer of a disordered world. We in the West essentially see Him as Savior—as Savior from sin. Is it okay to let American Indians find Jesus as Healer or Liberator first? I think that’s the question that needs to be asked—Who is Jesus to the nomads? How will He reveal Himself

to them? The great “side benefit” is that in so doing the missionary discovers and sees another facet of the great God that we serve!

The editorial (Vol. 17:2) entitled “Reaching the Last Frontiers” by Malcolm Hunter and David Phillips says,

To minister effectively to nomadic pastoralists would seem to require not just specific fresh missionary strategies, it also needs a broader, more specialized training. It needs a combination of technical skills, anthropological awareness and sound biblical theology that is not usually found in the traditional Bible College and Seminary...

This begs the question, Why not? What are we missing? I think it has to do with the idea of a serious lack of biblical theology—a lack of a unifying biblical theme to guide our practice as missionaries (as well as ministers within the churches). Our confusion and diffusion is in part due to our gifts of stratification and specialization. This breakdown in holistic or comprehensive theological maturity has also affected our wider culture and other disciplines such as medicine, education, social work and counseling.

Dr. Irving Whitt wrote an excellent article called “Evangelical Missions and the Decentering of Conviction” in *Mission Paradigm Shifts* (Vol. 16:3). His thesis, stated in one paragraph, says it all:

A major crisis faces Western Christianity, and it needs to be addressed urgently. It is the decentering of conviction as the result of theological slippage, philosophical re-orientation and contextual osmosis. One cannot understand the crisis, or get a handle on its solution, without seeing its underlying causes—the erosion of theology and biblical foundations, [the birth of] a basic philosophical reorientation of life [one that is anti-biblical, [the birth of] the modern post-modern worldview, which is essentially non-Christian, and [the birth of a] “contextual osmosis” in which we have lost, [and are loos-

ing] much of our Christian focus and message. Theology is important since the nature of one's beliefs affect the nature of one's conviction on all levels. [All of this] comprises "worldview stuff"—the least articulated reality that has shaped Christian mission in the past and will continue to do so in the future... It is just this context that precipitates the crisis. It is precisely in this context that God requires continued faithfulness [to Him].

The now world-famous mission course called "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement" became such a success, changed minds and lives of Christians everywhere, birthed an array of other related mission courses, as well as launched a wide-scale mission movement in the last 25 to 30 years. As I see it, this mission course and movement were directly related to the fact that we articulated a new mission theology that could support a global movement of God's people—that our God is a missionary God. The result was a new paradigm. It literally changed our view of Scripture, seeing God's "unified field theory" of His purpose and plan of world redemption for all the clans and peoples of the earth (see Richard Showalter's article "All the Clans, All the Peoples" in *Biblical Mandate, IJFM* 13:1), giving us holy zeal once again for God's plan of the ages as nothing else has done in recent years. It birthed a powerful mission course(s) and launched a new mission movement all based upon sound biblical foundations.

It's my conviction that this again is the need of the hour for us today! We need a new way of being and doing Church and Mission, one that involves the discovery of "true Truth" that changes us on a deep worldview level, that is fully and truly grounded in and inspired by God's Word and Spirit, that will renew our minds, rid us of any and all world conformity, so that we become fully trained "unto righteousness," making us whole and complete in our Lord and thus fully equipped to do His every good work everywhere (Rom. 12:1,2 and 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

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Missiological Maturity

Maturity is a hard concept to define. In laymen's terms, I think we could say, a mature person is someone who is comfortable in his or her skin. A mature missionary would be someone who is comfortable in someone else's skin. As I see Jesus in the Gospels, his whole demeanor speaks of a supreme state of rest. At Martha's request that he come to Bethany to minister to Lazarus her brother, he delays, finishing his work at hand. Did he know that Lazarus would die, that Martha would have a meltdown? Did He understand how he would appear to the crowds? What they would think of Him? Yes, the text tells us as much. His ability to rest consists in the certainty of His perceptions, of who He is—"the Good Shepherd"; that God will lead Him—"He only does what He sees the Father doing;" and of His purpose—"I came to bear witness to the truth." So, a missiologically mature missionary is one who knows the ways of men, the ways of God, who can rest, who has the spiritual qualifications to communicate them in a way that is not offensive but brings favor to man and glory to God. This implies an ability to let go of traditional methods of doing missions, and of accepting new ways of looking at reality (as worldview stuff) as we are enlightened by Scripture and the Spirit of God.

It was my conviction back in the Fall/Winter of 1999, which has grown stronger than ever, that *De-Westernizing the Gospel* (Vol. 16:4) in its entirety is one of the most important *IJFM* issues ever published in helping us form the missiological maturity framework. It addresses what I believe is needed today in Church and Mission as nothing else. It is what Jonathan Campbell called "Releasing the Gospel from Western Bondage," it's returning to (and for many of us it

means discovering for the first time) what our late brother (and modern-day prophet) called "Apostolic Service: The Mystery of Priestliness." I cannot stress enough how important and basic Art Katz' contributions are to the missionary enterprise. It is what David Wells talked about that Christians need to be converted. Each article in this all-important edition convinces us in one form or fashion the need and challenge for worldview change and renewal:

—"Releasing the Gospel from Western Bondage" by Jonathan Campbell

—"Responding to Split-level Christianity and Folk Religion" by Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou

—"Apostolic Service: The Mystery of Priestliness (Part I)" by Art Katz

—"Millennium Missiology: the Use of 'Egyptian Gold'" by David Hesselgrave

—"Comparing Modern-day Alternatives to Biblical Conversion" by David Wells

—"Apostolic Service: The Mystery of Priestliness (Part II)" by Art Katz

—"New Commitments at the Beginning of the New Millennium" by Irving Whitt

Often, as most of us know, missionary discussion is formed around achieving a worldview transformation in believers in the emerging church on the mission field. But in these articles, we see that not only are the unreached lost nations in need of it, but so are we at home, especially those who are being sent!

Two very special theme editions *Worldview I and II* (Volumes 14:1 and 2) deal with the heart of the matter concerning this basic need and challenge. Just a cursory reading of the list of articles tells the story.

For Worldview I:

—“Editorial: Worldview, World Religions and Missions” by Hans Weerstra

—“Christian Worldview Development (part I)” also by Hans Weerstra

—“One’s Future in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam” by Daniel Fuller

—“Yahweh and the Gods” by Ed Matthews

—“A Theology of Culture: Desecularizing Anthropology” by Gailyn Van Rheen

—“Christianity and the Religions in the History of the Church” by James F. Lewis

For Worldview II:

—“Editorial: Worldview, Missions and Theology” by Hans Weerstra

—“Christian Worldview Development (Part II)” by Hans Weerstra

—“Biblical Theology [compared to Systematic Theology] and the Analogy of Faith” by Daniel Fuller

—“Worldview, Scripture and Missionary Communication” by David Hesselgrave

—“Conversion and Worldview Transformation” by Paul Hiebert

—“Towards a Biblical Worldview: Reflections of a South Asian and a North American” by Natun Bhattacharya and Tom Eckblad

—“The Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation” by Daniel Fuller

—“Worldview and Discipling the Nations” by Darrow Miller

Darrow Miller’s thoughts in “Worldview II” touch directly on the issue:

In the United States in the last 25 years we have found a shift from one critical phase to another that has profoundly impacted our day-to-day existence. What do you think that shift might be? We have moved from the concept of the “sanctity” of life to the “quality”

of life, from an understanding that the smallest, oldest, most broken life is sacred, to the concept that only a productive life is worth [anything for] living. This shift in values was unimaginable [just] 30 years ago, yet it is commonplace today. . .

In America we see the moral decline of our nation. Even within the Church secularism is creeping in putting man at the center of the universe. It says, “I want to have fun, excitement and thrills. I want to be entertained. Even when I become a Christian I believe that God exists for me...” The moral and spiritual decline in America is not



at fault for [this] pervasive secularism. Rather, it is a symptom of secularism. The fault lies with us [Christians] in that the Church has failed to be the Church. We have failed to love God with all our minds; there is little place for truth in the objective sense, nor is there room for absolute moral standards, even in the Church.

Miller asks: “What can we do to stem the tide?” He answers:

First, we must begin to practice the Great Commandment and then live out the Great Commission. We need to begin by loving God again “with all our minds.” We need to consciously analyze our own worldview and the worldview-shaping stories that we see on television, in magazines, videos and music shops. Second, we are to begin to realize that the Great Commission is not merely about evangelizing souls for eternity. Rather, it has to do with discipling whole nations, about affecting worldview changes. We as Christians need to have a renewed

sense that we have the ability to build and rebuild whole nations and then act as responsible citizens of God’s Kingdom towards that end.

Last, but not least, we dedicated an entire single theme edition to the *Biblical Mandate* (Vol. 13:1) published back in the spring of 1996. This edition in a real sense is the bedrock of them all. The array of treasure hidden in each article leads us to the conclusion that indeed we need new paradigms in mission. And where do we turn for illumination? Answer: back to our foundations—the Old Testament.

—“Editorial: Shoring up the Foundations” by Hans Weerstra

—“The Great Commission in the Old Testament” by Walter Kaiser, Jr.

—“All the Clans, All the Peoples” by Richard Showalter

—“The Supremacy of God Among ‘All the Nations’” by John Piper

—“Challenging the Church to World Missions” by David Hesselgrave

—“Biblical Foundations for Missions: Seven Clear Lessons” by Thomas Schirrmacher

—“Seeing the Big Picture” by Ralph Winter

—“Melchizedek and Abraham Walk Together in World Missions” by Douglas Smith

—“The Biblical Basis and Priority for Frontier Missions” by William O’Brien

Why is this edition the bedrock edition of them all? Reason is that it sets the basis as well as the parameters of everything we do in world missions, frontier missions included.

Our desire and effort to evangelize the world must be firmly grounded in God and His Word. The mission mandate that we hold dear must rest squarely on biblical foundations. We cannot proceed and expect success in this task with wrong or shaky motives or questionable ideals. World missions must have sure foundations, and

unless these are firmly in place, we run the risk of being a “foolish man who built his house upon the sand... and great was its fall” when the storms hit (see Matt. 7:26, 27).

Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual maturity implies an acknowledgment that reality is fallen, that life will be a struggle and that things will break and be broken. But it is not hopeless, for it also looks towards the restoration of all things in Christ. Spiritual maturity understands that this is not the time for retreat but for war. A very special kind of war—a war of truth, a war of influence, a war of and for compassion, a war to overcome.

Spiritual Warfare II (Vol. 15:4) is a special edition entirely devoted to the important subject of spiritual warfare as it relates to the frontiers. In the first edition on this subject (Vol. 10:4), we focused on the need to correct our Western (warped) perspective of reality. We commented then that,

Few can doubt that Satan has made great advances in our modern world, including infiltrating our churches and playing havoc with our worldview. This has been accomplished largely by means of a slow but persistent shift of thinking regarding our view of reality, accomplished through so-called scientific thought that would see our world [reality] as a closed and self-contained natural system that [essentially] postulates Satan’s non-existence, along with other supernatural beings, and thus reduces [the solution to] our problems and the battles we face [and wage] to a natural plane of reality.

But in *Spiritual Warfare II* (Vol. 15:4) I asked,

Why are so many people still unreached in this late hour? Could it be that we today, and those who have gone before, have seriously misunderstood the spiritual nature of our mission, have failed to see the supernatural nature of the conflict of our task?

Here is a list of the articles that address this compelling need:

—“Spiritual Power to Change our World” by Patrick Johnstone

T*his blindness has caused untold and unneeded damage in many areas and on deep levels in our “missionizing.”*

—“Recognizing and Defeating the Powers of Darkness” by George Otis, Jr.

—“The Parsee: Liberating an Unreached People by Prayer and Fasting” by Kaezad Dadachanjee

—“Overcoming Spiritual Resistance that Brings Transformation” by John Robb

—“Beyond the Four Spiritual Laws” by Dean Michell

—“Community Transformation Through United and Persevering Prayer” by George Otis, Jr.

—“Praying for the Lost in the 10/40 Window” by Billy Joe Daugherty

—“Spiritual Breakthrough in Turkey” by the editors of *Religion Today*

For greater and better reasons, my answer today is affirmative. We as Western missionaries have to a large degree misunderstood the spiritual nature and conflict of our task. In fact, there is no doubt that the principle task of reaching the unreached peoples of the world has to do with the battle in the spiritual and invisible plane of reality—which we as missionaries from the West have largely ignored and therefore have not adequately waged. My conviction is that this is one main reason (if not *the* main reason) why so many of the world’s peoples and nations are still unreached—we are still ill-equipped to do this task. Do we see the need of fighting against unseen spiritual forces of wickedness that on the frontiers have reigned supreme, which are worshipped and served (placated and appeased) daily in uncontested ways and have been for centuries?

The result of this blind spot has been nothing short of devastating. Western missionaries haven’t “seen,” nor know how to deal with, the unseen supernatu-

ral world, mainly of evil and wickedness, especially on the frontiers, in the world at large, and in our own world at home. This blindness has caused untold and unneeded damage in many areas and on deep levels in our “missionizing efforts.” The result has produced syncretism (to a large or small degree), what secular anthropologists have called Christo-paganism, among most (if not all) non-Western oriented peoples and nations where Western missions have worked. Even worse, due to this “excluded middle” (as Paul Hiebert called it), we now see big-time syncretism of a modern-day kind at home. (See especially Vishal Mangalwadi’s article “From Enlightenment to Endarkenment” in Vol. 15:3.)

Drawing Conclusions

Probably the most challenging article on this urgent need and daunting challenge is entitled “Great Commission Contextualization,” written by David Hesselgrave. I want to quote significant sections of it because there’s so much correspondence between what Hesselgrave saw and experienced and what I have seen, believe and have experienced. Hesselgrave starts off by making a confession:

I confess that for all my missiological life and most of my missiological tenure I erred rather grievously. My sin was more one of omission than commission, but nevertheless it was a costly mistake. I was nurtured and subsequently ministered on a “simple gospel” basis: the idea that we are to encapsulate the Gospel into two or three (or four or six things) that “God wants people to know,” and that if a person assents to those and accepts Christ, subsequently he/she will be saved; and that leaders [then] are free to nurture converts in any way that suits personal preferences and pre-understandings.

Over the years I have come to believe that an omniscient God has

already provided the key to both world evangelization and effective contextualization [of the Gospel]. In effect, and with your indulgence, I therefore propose to outline the progress of my thinking over a generation and illustrate the contextualization process as I now understand it.

At this point Hesselgrave goes into a lengthy discussion of the process he calls contextualization—all of it very enlightening. But the next event in his life changed him because it confirmed something he was already aware of:

Timothy M. Warner first crossed my pathway when some years ago I became concerned over the direction that so much of Christian counseling was taking, following as it was upon the heels of humanistic psychology. One of my colleagues at TEDS, Dr. Warner, became more and more involved in spiritual warfare and a deliverance ministry. It is a long story, but I will just say that one day before his departure [from TEDS] for another ministry I went to his office. During the ensuing discussion Warner made a statement that was to be confirmation of the direction my own thinking and writing was taking at the time. He said, "Dave, I have become convinced that truth encounter must precede power encounter." He went on to explain that a great number of Christian people themselves—many of them already in Christian service (!)—have not really grasped a biblical worldview and as a consequence live frustrated, defeated lives. He was in process, therefore, of building his counseling ministry upon the foundation of a re-examination of the relationship between the Triune God, men and women, the spirit world, and the self as it unfolds in Scripture beginning with Genesis and working straight through the Old and New Testaments.

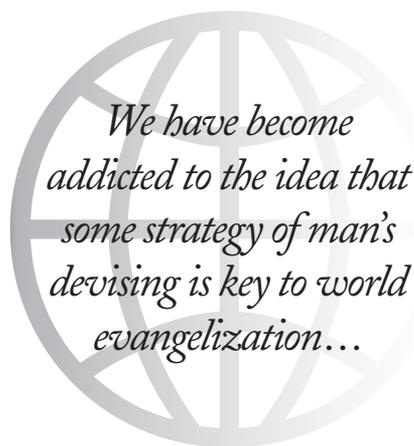
At the end of his article, Hesselgrave gives his prognosis of the matter and again couches it in a confession:

Perhaps all of this is another case of "old men dreaming dreams." The very idea of any large grouping of missionaries, evangelists, counselors,

and pastors/teachers subordinating their carefully studied—or, at least, habitual—approaches to the framework of biblical theology seems idealistic in the extreme. The notion that it would make any significant difference if they did may seem to be hopeful but quite impractical.

But Hesselgrave says:

Not so! After going through "Walk Through the Bible," "Divine Drama," "Bible Panorama" and similar studies, even Christians who have been in the church for many years often exclaim, "I've never seen it this way before."



He continues:

In my estimation, Great Commission contextualization [which is based upon worldview transformation] is our most hopeful strategy if we are serious about world evangelization. Not only does it best meet the requirements of Scripture itself, it also qualifies on the basis of sound principles of communication, anthropology, psychology and other social science disciplines.

We might ask, What does Hesselgrave now believe after years of trial and error? Here's his answer:

Were someone to ask me what I believe to be the greatest missiological strategy ever devised I would now answer, "Tell them the story of Jesus. Write on their hearts every word." I would remind us all of that which we may already know. Namely, that Jesus is the Seed of the woman in Genesis 3, the Bright Morning Star of

Revelation 22, and that indeed, the whole Bible relates this "His story."

Note here that "biblical theology" is a technical term that Hesselgrave carefully defined and described in his article. What we need to see and understand above all else is that "biblical theology," when done correctly, when inspired by the Spirit, who leads us into all Truth, (into what Chuck Kraft called and spelled REALITY, see his book "Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural") produces true lasting worldview transformation.

During the last few years since I was editor of the *IJFM*, my wife Judy and I have written several courses in "biblical theology" one, based solely on the first 12 chapters of Genesis, we call "The Genesis Touch." We've developed a whole course called "Worldview Transformation" and are still refining it. We have taught this and other courses to many believers, missionaries included, who have experienced radical transformation in their hearts, minds and lives. Best of all, most have received a God-given, Spirit-inspired worldview of life and reality that makes them complete in the Lord and equipped to do His every good work.

Hesselgrave ends his article with the following:

To be sure, habits are not easily changed. Though storytelling is one of the earliest and most important arts known to man, telling and retelling redemptive history and prophecy does not seem sophisticated enough for moderns and post-moderns who are beholden to human sciences. We have become so addicted to the idea that some strategy of man's devising (once baptized with the holy water of Bible proof texting) is key to world evangelization that we cling to that idea even though recent history shows that one key after another fails to [fit in and] turn the lock. Could it be that, despite all our emphasis on understanding receptor cultures, we have failed to

understand how captive we are to our own culture and its worldview?

Hesselgrave writes,

Gospel communication may take a variety of forms. We have no quarrel with that. But after all has been said and done, it is God's Word that is to be made known to all peoples in all cultures. That Word is like a lion. Christian communicators should first of all unleash that lion!

IJFM Treasure

Most of the issues of the *IJFM*, and the articles we have discussed here, plus many others we have not mentioned, (see list in the side column of *IJFM* back issues) are being made available to the mission community, missionaries, mission churches and mission leaders, for the price of shipping and handling. The minimum order is one full box that will contain 100 to 120 *IJFM* back issues, which can be mixed with a variety of back issues, or all be one single issue. The cost of shipping one box anywhere in the U.S., plus handling is \$20.00. Send your orders or requests by mail to *IJFM* Special Offer, 4408 Oxford Street, El Paso TX 79903, or by e-mail to hweerstra@sbcglobal.net. Note: a check for your request or order, made out to SWCWM (Southwest Center for World Missions), must be sent to us before shipping. **IJFM**

For a complete list of IJFM 1993–2000 issues and articles, please see pp. 124–126.

Note: Only the issues that appear on the list on the right are available as part of the IJFM Special Offer mentioned above.

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